

THE SECOND MATE

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BY
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THE SECOND MATE

I

THE *Sulu Queen* was steaming south at an eight-knot clip, which for her was exceedingly good, bound for Macassar, Singapore and way ports, according to the dispensation of Providence. Her tail shaft was likely to go at any minute; she had an erratic list to starboard; her pumps could barely keep down the water that seeped through her loose plates; but she was going. Just to be going was an achievement for the *Sulu Queen*. She was certain not to be going for very long.

Her Macaense—or Portuguese Eurasian—skipper was enjoying an opium dream in his cabin. Her chief engineer, a one-eyed Cyclops who had long since buried his Glasgow

accent under a maze of tropic profanity, was dead drunk. Her black gang was composed of Macao coolies. Her men forward were lascars, under a mild-eyed Malay serang who was an escaped murderer from Bilibid Prison. Her two quartermasters were Chinese, and efficient. Her supercargo was a Straits Chinese comprador, a Singapore man. Her mate was a hulking Dutchman, rotten with gin alow and aloft. Her second mate was Jim Barnes, for whose labor all these others drew pay.

She carried nine passengers. Abdullah, an Arab merchant, was going home to Macassar, taking with him his first wife and five offspring. How the Slave of God, as his name bore witness, ever got to Canton with so many, was a mystery; what had become of the other three lawful wives, not to mention the unlawful ones, was a greater mystery. The other two passengers were Nora Sayers and Ellen Maggs.

They were missionaries of some kind in

China, had been ordered to voyage for their health, and as their funds were low, had taken the *Sulu Queen*. Jim Barnes had been too busy to ask questions. He would have welcomed them on the bridge, except that the Dutchman and the chief were both up there, nearly naked and rather soused. They had been there in that condition since leaving Canton. When he explained the matter to them, Ellen Maggs blushed faintly, and Nora Sayers was quite willing to come along anyhow; but Ellen prevailed.

At two bells in the morning watch, Jim Barnes heaved a huge sigh of relief and left the bridge, which he had perforce held since before midnight. The islands were past; Simonor was dropping astern into the horizon and ahead was the open Celebes Sea and a clear course for Macassar. By some miracle the coral reefs had been evaded.

Jim Barnes sought the galley and obtained some tea from the yellow cook. He gulped it down and then started for his own cabin,

meaning to get some sleep. The quartermaster of his watch had the bridge and a fair course.

Then, at the door of his stateroom, he paused with a sudden oath. The course was south by a quarter east; to his amazement, Barnes discovered that the ship was swinging around until the sun was almost astern.

With another oath of weary, wondering disgust, he started for the ladder. As he touched it, he heard his name spoken, and glanced around. The other quartermaster, Li Fu by name, was gliding toward him, and the yellow face was gleaming with inward excitement.

"What is it?" demanded Barnes.

"Maste', you watch out velly sha'p!" exclaimed Li Fu, low-voiced, tense. "Bad piecee bobbery kick up, mebbeso two bells this afte'noon! I think mebbeso all hands talkee-talkee make fo' mutiny. Cap'n he say fo' tell you come see him."

"You tell the skipper to go to hell," said Barnes. "Opium crazy, that's what he is.

Mutiny. 'Good gosh, we've nothing to mutiny for!'

"Cap'n he say head in fo' Sesajap," persisted the Chinaman.

Jim Barnes groaned. "Head in for Sesajap, eh? Heading in for Borneo—the skipper changed the course, did he? That why we're turning?"

Li Fu nodded, beady eyes alert.

"Well, I've no time now to palaver with that cursed Eurasian topside," said Barnes bluntly. "You tell him to take the bridge or chase Vanderhoof up there—I'm done. Savvy? I'm going to sleep. Let everybody mutiny and be damned. I'm the only seaman aboard this cursed packet anyhow. I'm tired o' doing ten men's work. Trouble coming this afternoon, is it? Then let afternoon take care of itself. I'll be ready to take the deck after this watch is over—noon. And, listen! Tell the cap'n that if he don't shoot the sun and verify his position after this running around, he'll land us all in hell. You savvy that?"

Then tell him from me. And if he wants to run us into Borneo, let him do it!"

Li Fu grinned delightedly and stated that he savvied plenty. He, like any efficient seaman, had no use for the other officers and regarded Jim Barnes as a little tin god. Jim Barnes went into his cabin, locked the door, stuck a chair under the knob, and then dropped on his bunk, dead to the world.

Down in the engine-room, where the heat had sent the chief into a drunken stupor, the Malay serang conferred with the two assistant engineers. They were both men of color, being Macaense like the skipper, but not, like him, owning a large share in the *Sulu Queen*. Filling his mouth with betel paste, expectorating a scarlet stream across the floor under the ladder, the serang spoke as he squatted there with the two engineers.

"The supercargo, Lim Tock, is a very clever man. He has arranged everything into shares; there will be one hundred shares made of

everything. Fifty of these will be divided among the men, the other fifty among us, the officers."

"Good," assented the second engineer. "How many are in it, Gajah?"

Gajah, the serang, spat again, and his soft eyes glowed luminously.

"All the men, here and above. The wireless man, the two quartermasters, *Tuan Barnes*, and the cap'n must be killed. *Tuan Vanderhoof* will navigate the ship. He is a great coward, and after his feet are burned he will be glad to serve us. This chief engineer must be killed, too. Six altogether. You will attend to this chief."

The two Eurasians looked at each other, then at the supinely snoring figure of the chief. They grinned and nodded. The chief would be drunk again after tiffin.

"You are sure of the men?" asked the third.

"Of course," said Gajah. "Lim Tock shipped them carefully at Canton, and my own men are picked for the purpose."

"Why has the course been changed?" demanded the second engineer.

"Because I whispered into the ear of the cap'n," said Gajah, with a meditative smile. "I told him that I knew a chief at one of the islands in the mouth of the Sesajap River, who had a great deal of gold dust, many birds' nests, and some fine pearls and shell. The *tuan* cap'n is very greedy. He changed the course immediately."

"Is there such a man?" asked the third. Gajah grinned in derision.

"Why not? Once I knew such a man at Sibuko, which is not far away. He was the second cousin of my elder brother's third wife, and he was very rich. I went to visit him, and induced his youngest wife to run away with me. But she forgot to bring the pearls with her, being in love with me, and so I slew her. That happened in Manila, and they put me into prison because of it. The white *tuans* did not understand."

"Well, when is this to take place?" asked the second engineer nervously.

"At the striking of two bells in the next watch."

"It shall be done. Who is to command, after that?"

"The supercargo, Lim Tock," answered the serang. "He is very clever. A friend of his, also a member of the Lim family, is to meet us near Bunju Island with a junk of which he is cap'n. Since the arrangement is all Lim Tock's, he deserves to command. It was he who got the opium put aboard at Macao."

"One thing," put in the third, his dark and muddy eyes gleaming. "The two white women! Surely they are not to be killed?"

"One does not waste the gifts of Allah," said Gajah sententiously. "The one with yellow hair goes to me; the other, who blushes often and whose figure is that of the willow, will comfort Lim Tock for the loss of his eldest son, who was hanged by the English last month for killing a white *tuan*. After a little while we shall sell them to chiefs along the coast, and so be rid of them. *Wallah!* It is hot down here."

He arose, knotted his fine silk *sarong* more closely about his waist, loosened his shagreen-hilted kris in its sheath, and departed. The two engineers looked at each other, and a slow smile passed between them.

"She of the yellow hair," said the third reflectively, "is tall and strong, of high spirit, and a fitting mate for me, whose veins run with the proud blood of the da Soussas!"

"And she of the lissome body," said the second engineer, rubbing his bristly chin, "has ere now smiled very sweetly upon me. It is not proper that yellow and brown island scum should have precedence before us, men descended from the conquistadors!"

"I agree with you," responded the other. "But what are we to do?"

"First secure the ship," said the second promptly. "Then secure—what we want."

"Good!" agreed the third engineer with emphasis. "Let us consider the matter."

Meantime, in the chart-house Li Fu had delivered the second mate's message to the be-

fuddled skipper, who sat dreamily over his charts. The message was literally delivered, but it could not stir the captain into action. He was lost in the reverie of contemplation that comes of good opium; not actual dreams, as some think, but a complacent sweetishness in the mind that shoves aside all immediate problems and refuses to take a crisis seriously.

The captain, indeed, was a lost soul. Usually your opium-eater cannot smoke the drug at all, and the smoker cannot attain Nirvana by eating it. This Macaense, however, both ate and smoked, thereby letting damnation into himself by two channels. He was a thin, pasty man, once of powerful physique, but now rather rickety on his pins.

"One hundred and seventy miles to the mouth of the Sesajap," he murmured. "We shall reach it at five o'clock tomorrow morning."

He gave over thinking and plucked vacuously at his thin mustaches.

"Providing the engines hold," added Li Fu,

who spoke better Portuguese than English. "If the night is clear, there will be a new moon. We should sight the coast by midnight."

"The engines!" repeated the skipper. "Where is the chief? He was here an hour ago."

"He went below, sir. The mate woke up and went into the wheel-house."

"Bring him here, Li Fu."

The quartermaster went out of the chart-house, presently to return alone.

"He is asleep, sir. We cannot wake him."

"Drunk, eh? Never mind, never mind. I will take the observation myself at noon——"

"And at two bells, sir," reminded Li Fu cautiously.

"Oh, you are a fool, Quartermaster! These men will not mutiny. There is no reason for it. You are not used to Lascars and must not be a fool. I shall go to rest and make ready my instruments. The course is to be held as it is."

The captain rose and, with a sigh of relief that no more duty presented itself, made his way back to his cabin.

Li Fu studied the outspread chart and lighted a cigarette. After a while, the other quartermaster left the wheel lashed and came into the chart-house, also lighting a cigarette. The two men greeted each other quietly. Like Li Fu, Quartermaster Hi John was a stalwart, efficient seaman, calm and well poised. He addressed Li Fu in the Cantonese dialect.

“You told him, Li?”

“I told him,” said Li Fu. “He went to sleep. He was very weary.”

“Did you find out why the captain changed the course?”

“No. He thinks more about his *hap toi* than about what I ask him. I woke up the chief and told him, but he was too drunk to understand. He asked if there was no help for the widow's son, and went to sleep again. His mind is gone.”

"The second mate will fight," said Hi John thoughtfully.

"If he is not slain before he gets a chance."

"There remains the wireless officer."

"True. He remains."

The two men looked at each other and smiled mirthlessly. The wireless man was the privileged son of a Macaense, chief owner of the *Sulu Queen*. Cumshaw had obtained his berth; he did not know one end of the wireless from another, as the quartermasters had learned when Jim Barnes cursed him for an idiotic fool. He was no better than an idiot; he was, indeed, some degrees worse, since the diseased degeneracy of Asia was his heritage.

"Then you and I are alone," said Hi John.

"We are alone. What answer shall we make to Lim Tock when the time comes?"

Hi John extinguished his cigarette.

"Duty is a shining star," Li Fu. "I have a revolver in my bag."

"I have one also," said Li Fu. "Yet I do not want to swallow gold."

"Nor I; this life is good." Hi John lighted another cigarette. "Still, consider duty! Lim Tock is a terrible man. It was he who sank the Dutch steamer last year, before his son was hung. His son helped him. They each got two Dutch women and much money. If we do not join him, Li, I think that we shall both swallow gold."

"Yes. Then you join him."

"Oh, no." Hi John's singsong tones were soft. "Oh, no! I did not mean that."

Li Fu looked slightly ironic. "You think this ship worth dying for? Or those white women beautiful enough to die for?"

"Not at all," said Hi John. "The ship is a rotten hulk. The women are ugly and pale as ghosts. I care nothing what becomes of either. At the same time, I revere the wisdom of my paternal parent, who was also an officer in a ship. Before he swallowed gold, he asked me to take an oath that I would never swerve from my duty. Therefore I cannot well join Lim Tock, since I undertook a certain duty aboard this ship."

"That is true," said Li Fu. "I have no oath to restrain me, but my duty needs no oath. Therefore I agree with you fully. I shall get my revolver, and also yours, while you are on the bridge; I have had it two rice-years, but it is a good one."

"Very well," said Hi John. "Give me mine when you have the opportunity."

While these two men talked on the bridge-deck, Lim Tock, the super-cargo, walked aft on the main-deck, past the dingy passenger-cabins where the brood of Abdullah swarmed about the two "missionary ladies." Lim Tock was an elderly Straits Chinaman, with a short, gray mustache, a drawn, parchment face, and two bright and glittering gray eyes—a most amazing pair of eyes to be staring from a saffron face! Yet some Chinese are gray-eyed.

In the stern, he came upon Abdullah, the Arab merchant, who was reading a Koran. The Arab looked up, smiled slightly, and spoke in the Low Malay which most men use

in the island seas. This Slave of God was a thin and deadly looking person, fierce with his hook nose and jutting shreds of beard and jetty eyes.

“All is arranged?”

“It is arranged,” said Lim Tock. “You agree to take the white women off our hands?”

“Yes; and to ask no other share of the rewards.”

Lim Tock inclined his head and passed on around to the starboard passage. There he came upon Gajah, the serang, busy doing nothing. To him Lim Tock spoke in High Malay, a tongue which very few men know or understand, even in the island seas.

“Abdullah suspects nothing. His boxes will be rich plunder. Let him be the first to fall, and his children after him—a clean sweep.”

“And the woman, his wife?” asked the Lascar serang.

“She has borne many and is past pleasing. Let her accompany Abdullah.”

The serang nodded indifferently and Lim Tock went his way.

While men thus talked and schemed and counseled together a low and aloft, Jim Barnes slept.

II

NORA SAYERS was tall and active, with brilliant yellow hair and very deep violet eyes; a young woman of great energy, who had seen too much bloodshed in the revolutionary fighting around Peking, and who had turned her mission station into a hospital of tortured men. Ellen Maggs, smaller, very slender and frail in looks, was newer to China, but she, too, had seen so many horrors that the powers above had thought best to send both women away on a sea voyage in company. Ellen Maggs, however, had more steel beneath her quiet and old-fashioned exterior than men imagined possible.

When they entered the mess saloon at eight bells, noon, they were not surprised to find themselves alone. They had by this time grown used to the peculiar conditions prevail-

ing aboard the *Sulu Queen*. The chief had a lurking sense of shame that kept him from their presence. The captain had the bridge. The wireless officer came in, bowed very effusively, and seated himself. He could speak no English, and listened staringly to the laughter and light chatter of the two women. Abdullah and his family ate by themselves.

Presently Jim Barnes entered, bathed and shaven and with his usual air of radiating high good-humor. Almost at the same moment came Vanderhoof, eyes bloodshot, walk unsteady, to seat himself with a grunt and absorb quantities of coffee and rice-curry. He gave Barnes a scowling regard across the table.

"Der cap'n say for you to take der pridge," he growled.

"Not me," said Barnes pleasantly. "Now that we've open sea ahead, you and he can do a little work, Van. Everything's galley-west aboard this hooker, and the watches might as well go with the rest."

The yellow steward set an open gin-bottle beside the mate, who poured a tumbler full, then glared at Barnes.

"By chiminy," he said, "d'you refuse to opey orders, huh?"

"You bet I do," said Jim Barnes, his eyes twinkling. "And if you know what's good for your health, Van, you'll sober up before you try to give me any. Savvy that?"

Despite the cheerful accent, something in the steady and level regard of the second mate caused Vanderhoof to drink down his gin without making any response. When he had emptied the bottle, he shoved back his chair and left the cabin.

"Well, ladies," said Barnes, "how do you find yourselves this morning? Rather warm last night. Did your fan work all right?"

"Quite, thanks," and Nora Sayers smiled. "Aren't you just a trifle independent with your superior officers, Mr. Barnes? I thought all sailors were very polite——"

Barnes grinned. "Oh, me and Van? Don't

pay any attention to that, Miss Sayers. He was just trying to show his authority in front of you and Miss Maggs."

"Oh!" Nora Sayers laughed. "Isn't it mutiny to refuse to obey orders?"

"Not aboard this packet. The skipper has been hitting the pipe all morning and now he's got us headed slap for Borneo. Lord knows why; I don't."

Ellen Maggs smiled shyly.

"You're the most happily irresponsible person I ever met, Mr. Barnes," she said. "And so is this ship. Every voyage in her must be a delightful adventure, if it's like this one! Have you been with her long?"

"This is my first and last," said Barnes drily. "You can't say that you've enjoyed yourselves so far, can you?"

"I have, every minute of it!" exclaimed Ellen Maggs, an unwonted sparkle in her eyes.

"And so have I," asserted Nora Sayers with energy. "Look at the queer people we've

met! This funny little man down the table, who stares and giggles——”

“He’s part idiot,” interjected Jim Barnes. “But who else?”

“All of them! The poor old captain, with his politeness and queer abstractions and——”

“The old man’s only forty,” and Barnes chuckled. “But the hops gets ’em early. So you like the Eurasians, do you?”

“I don’t like them, no, but they’re interesting,” stated Miss Sayers. “And the chief engineer is queer, too, only he won’t talk——”

“I was talking with him early this morning,” put in Ellen Maggs. “He’s a dear old man, Nora. He was telling me all about his early life in Scotland.”

“He always does,” put in Jim Barnes, “when he’s in the middle of a big spree. Oh, don’t look shocked! Won’t do any good. I guess you ladies are disappointed that you didn’t find another queer duck in the second officer’s shoes, eh? Or am I queer, too?”

“You’re just human,” declared Miss Say-

ers promptly. "Only you're too busy to be very polite."

"I'm going to be busier yet, right after lunch," said Jim Barnes. "Oh, Steward! Get me some more of that curry."

"Why, what have you found now to keep you occupied?" asked Ellen Maggs, interested.

Jim Barnes did not respond until the steward had left the cabin. Then he spoke cheerfully, as he sugared his coffee with some care.

"Me? I've got to set the ship afire. As soon as they give the alarm, I want you two ladies to come up to the upper bridge-deck, and come quick! I'll be in the chart-house——"

"You mean that little coop up above the bridge, with the awning?" asked Nora Sayers.

"Just that. I'll get there before they discover the blaze."

The two women stared at him, then glanced at each other in perplexed wonder.

"What do you mean, Mr. Barnes?" de-

manded Ellen Maggs, a faint touch of color in her cheeks. "Are you joking about setting the ship afire?"

"No," said Jim Barnes. His tone was unusually crisp, and the look that he gave them was keen and incisive. "No." Don't let out a peep before the steward, now! A mutiny is due to start at one o'clock, and, so far as I can see, most of the officers will get wiped out at the first crack. Mutiny or piracy, I'm not sure which. I've got to set the hooker afire and keep the men so blamed busy they'll have no time for murder. Please pass the butter, Miss Maggs."

His matter-of-fact manner made the two women at first doubt his words, then believe them with a frightful sense of conviction. Ellen Maggs stared at him from eyes that slowly widened. Glancing up and meeting her gaze, Jim Barnes was suddenly startled by the intensity of her look, by the revealed womanhood he saw in her face; he had not dreamed that she could look so beautiful.

"I'm sorry I scared you," he said, smilingly. There was an infectious quality to his smile; perhaps because of his direct blue eyes, wrinkled at the corners; perhaps because of his wide and humorous mouth and strong chin. "But the steward's coming now——"

"You're in earnest?" demanded Nora Sayers, who had gone a little white.

"Quite. Nobody aboard can use the wireless, unless you ladies can. Any chance?"

Ellen Maggs shook her head.

"No chance," she said, and astonished Jim Barnes by smiling. "But I have a pistol in my suitcase——"

"Fine!" exclaimed Barnes heartily. The steward entered with his plate of curry. "You get it. And you girls might as well buckle down to the fact that before we get through there's going to be a large slice of the lower regions laid bare aboard this hooker. Is that an engagement ring you're wearing, Miss Sayers? Pardon personalities; I'm asking for a reason."

"Yes." Nora Sayers twisted the ring on her finger. "It's——"

"All right. If you ever want to add a plain gold hoop to it, you remember that there's just one man aboard who can pull you out o' this, and that's me. I don't want any interference, and I do want help. Get me?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Ellen Maggs, and her eyes were shining. "Just where do you want us to come, please? You spoke about the chart-house——"

"Come there, and I'll see you up safe to the awning deck above. A little before two bells. Bring with you anything that you value very highly. We may stave off this fuss until night, in which case we'll be all right. Well, cheer up and don't worry! See you later."

Jim Barnes pushed back his chair, produced his pipe, and began to fill it as he left the mess saloon. He stood by the rail a moment, until his pipe was lighted.

"I guess that was laying bare the situation with a rough and brutal hand," he said, and

chuckled softly. "Had to be done, though. And now I've got to step mighty carefully. Most likely those assistant engineers are in on the game; they're Eurasians, too, so I can't take chances. If anyone suspects that I know about things, the blow-off will come before two bells—which would spoil everything for me. But lordy! What a pippin that little Maggs girl is! She's a regular guy."

From his language, it might be inferred that Jim Barnes was an American.

Puffing at his pipe, he sought the engine-room. The chief blinked up at him from a huge plate of curry. A glance showed Barnes that neither of the assistants were about, and he ventured an open word.

"Chief, wake up! Mutiny is scheduled for two bells, and if you don't want your throat cut you'd better be advised——"

"Get oot o' ma engine-room!" ordered the chief with dignity. "Ye drunken scut, can ye not bear your liquor like a man? I'll hae no drunken officers cooming doon here to be

bawlin' o' mutinies in ma ear! Tak' shame to yoursel', sir!"

Barnes compressed his lips and turned away. It was useless.

The *Sulu Queen*, originally a well-decked tramp, had been fitted up rather shabbily to carry passengers in the island trade, the after portion of the deck-house having been added to for this purpose. Carrying all the oily waste he could conceal about his person, Jim Barnes made his way aft to one of the unoccupied cabins. The two white passengers were not in sight. In the stern, beneath a tattered awning, Abdullah sat smoking a water-pipe, his wife and family around him.

"They're safe enough," observed Barnes, as he ducked into the cabin he sought. "Even if the old packet can't get up enough steam to check the flames, and goes down; they'll be taken care of. So, on with the dance!"

The fact that he was committing various sorts of barratry and felony, did not worry Jim Barnes in the least.

The storm season being past, the lookout or awning-deck above the pilot-house was fitted up with awning and canvas aprons and some chairs, but remained almost unused. The additional climb of a dozen feet from the chart and pilot-house was far too much trouble for the captain and others; besides which, the place was no more than a box a dozen feet square, and was hot. A single ladder ascended to it from the bridge deck, which it overlooked completely.

Shortly before two bells, Jim Barnes welcomed Ellen Maggs and Nora Sayers, as they came up to the bridge. He was alone there, with Li Fu and two of the lascars in the chart-house. Down in the bows, Lim Tock, the supercargo, was standing in talk with the steward, and both watches were idling about the deck.

"How do we get upstairs?" asked Ellen Maggs.

"Right this way, ladies!" answered Barnes

cheerfully. "Chairs up there and a couple of old magazines, as well as a breaker of water and some other things. Whatever happens, don't worry—and wait for me. Here you are!"

As they vanished up the ladder, he re-entered the chart-house and addressed the two lascar seamen.

"Run, quick! One of you to the serang, the other to Lim Tock. Say that I smell smoke, and have search made for fire. Look at the bunkers, but don't take off the hatches until the last thing. If there's a fire in the forward hold, call me."

A startled glance passed between the two men, and they jumped for the ladder. Jim Barnes turned to the quartermaster, smiling slightly.

"Where is Hi John?"

"Him look velly sharp, I think."

"We can depend on him?"

Li Fu nodded.

"All right, then," said Barnes. "You go

tell him to come up here. Then take charge of those lascars and keep 'em out of the after cabins for a while, until the fire shows itself. You savvy? Don't be in any hurry to put it out, either. We'll hold this thing off until night if we can."

Across the saffron features flitted a look of admiration, for Li Fu comprehended the plan instantly. Then the quartermaster was gone. Barnes looked at the chronometer. It lacked five minutes of one.

"Two bells won't be struck," he thought, as he swung the wheel.

He grinned at sight of the commotion below. Lim Tock was yelling orders at those of the black gang whom he could see. Gajah, the serang, was whistling at his lascars shrilly. Then he remembered the chief engineer, and rang the bell. One of the assistants answered in the tube.

"Ship's on fire," said Jim Barnes, chuckling to himself. "Stop your engines and keep up a full head o' steam for the hose."

Hi John appeared, gave Barnes a brief nod and a grin, and took the wheel. There had never been any fire drill aboard the *Sulu Queen* in the memory of man, but Barnes blew the whistle nevertheless and added to the confusion. Vanderhoof's bellow arose from below, followed by an outburst of yells and shouts from aft.

"They've found it," said Barnes.

He went to the bridge rail and glanced aft. A trail of smoke and steam was veering out in the wake of the steamer. Barnes listened for a little to the sounds of tumultuous confusion, then rejoined the quartermaster.

"How did you and Li Fu know so much about this mutiny?" he demanded.

"Talkee-talkee," rejoined Hi John curtly. "My savvy lascar talk plenty."

"Oh! Understand Malay, do you? Good work. What reason have they to mutiny?"

Hi John had picked up a good deal of information. He knew that the rich boxes of the merchant Abdullah were to be looted, and

that there was a large amount of opium down below, to be transferred to a Chinese junk and landed somewhere along the Bornean coast. Undoubtedly, the *Sulu Queen* was to be stripped of everything valuable, then quietly sunk in deep water. Lim Tock was in it, the serang Gajah was in it, and the Chinese junk was in it; so were some of the officers and all the men aboard.

Reluctantly Jim Barnes became convinced that to strive against the inevitable would be useless. Except for these two Chinese, he could depend upon no one. Had he been alone on the ship, his actions would have been simple and perhaps effectual.

"I'd like to go down there and shoot the supercargo, the serang, and a few of the men, and get the old hooker into port," he said to Hi John. "But the safety of those two white women is worth more than this damned old carcass of a boat. I can't risk it."

Hi John looked bewildered at this reasoning, which he could not understand. At this

instant Li Fu came up the port ladder, panting, and grinned as he saluted Barnes.

"Mutiny makee, no matter! I think they wait, same time tonight, mebbeso."

"Two bells evening watch?" demanded Barnes.

"Aye, sir. Cap'n say go ahead on course, he makee fire go out."

Barnes rang for full speed ahead, then questioned Li Fu. Both the skipper and Vanderhoof were in charge, it seemed, and were fighting the fire. Vanderhoof was somewhat sobered by the danger; the captain was almost incapacitated and was acting like an old woman, according to Li. The quartermaster was highly disgusted. It was the effort of the serang, whose lascars were working hard, that was putting the fire under control.

Presently the skipper himself appeared. He was breathing hard and was all in a tremble. He wiped his pallid brow and cursed heartily.

"Fire under?" asked Barnes.

"Yes, yes, or soon will be. No matter at all. Very disturbing," panted the captain. "I must obtain some rest, must verify our position. Keep her as she is, sir."

He looked around, nervously fingered the chart, then departed. Barnes looked after him in contempt, then went to the ladder leading above.

"Gone for a few pipes, the swine!" he muttered, then looked up and raised his voice. "Come on down, girls. Mutiny's postponed until tonight. False alarm and nobody killed yet."

III

WHAT part are you from?" asked Jim Barnes.

"Illinois," said Ellen Maggs. "From Elgin, where they make watches. Were you ever there?"

"No closer than the outside of a watch," responded Barnes. "But now I'm going there some day."

"Why?"

"To see where you came from."

Ellen Maggs laughed a little and actually forgot to blush.

"Do it again," said Barnes.

"Do what?"

"Laugh that way. It's the prettiest thing I ever saw."

Ellen blushed at that, then turned as Nora Sayers joined them.

"Nora! Mr. Barnes comes from Baltimore, too! He was born there!"

"Good for him!" Nora Sayers laughed in her hearty, energetic fashion. "Perhaps you know my father there, Mr. Barnes—the physician, Doctor Sayers?"

"Don't know anybody there," admitted Jim Barnes. "I've been at sea ever since the war finished up, and before. But I'm going to settle down some day, across the bay from San Francisco. Ever been there, Miss Maggs?"

"Only when I came out to China."

"Well," said Jim Barnes, in his whimsical all picked out! A fine little bungalow on one of the hills at Sausalito, where you can see the ships all up and down the bay, and the campanile at Berkeley clear across——"

"Have you got the girl picked out, too?" asked Nora Sayers amusedly.

"Well," said Jim Barnes, in his whimsical way, "I didn't have up to a couple of weeks ago, but lately I've sort of got my mind made up. By the way, girls, you'd better get all

ready. We're going to leave the ship in an hour or two."

"Leave her?" they repeated as one, in dismayed accents. "How?"

"You'll see. I'll take the bridge when watches are changed at eight bells—eight o'clock. You come up to the bridge a little before then, and stick around. Excuse me, now; I'll have to pack a few things myself."

Barnes hurried away, leaving the two women at the rail.

Dinner was over, a meal from which all three were glad to escape, coming out on deck to find the sun gone and the afterglow staining the horizon like old church windows. A tragic affair, that dinner! The captain was ill and did not appear; Vanderhoof was on deck, more drunk than usual; the second engineer quarreled with the wireless cub, who lost his head in a fit of idiotic rage and had to be taken away and locked up, screaming curses. The chief engineer was also locked in

his own cabin, enjoying a spell of "the horrors."

Wishing vainly that he understood something about the wireless outfit, Barnes sought his cabin and packed up the few belongings that he wished to take from the ship. While he was at this task, Li Fu knocked at the door and entered hurriedly.

"Hello! What news? Is it set for two bells?"

Li Fu assented. He was bursting with laughter over some joke of the cruel Chinese variety, and Barnes presently learned what it was. He was ordering Li to warn Abdullah of what was intended, with the intent to get the Arab's family away safely, when the quartermaster exploded in a laugh and reported a conversation that he had overheard among some of the lascars.

It appeared that Abdullah was as much in the plot as anyone, and was to receive as his booty the two white women. The assistant engineers had an eye on the same prey; while

Lim Tock and Gajah, the serang, were equally concerned. To the Chinese, this was a huge jest all around, for it meant that the wolves would turn and rend each other.

"Hell!" said Jim Barnes. "I hate to leave the kids here. But go ahead, now; and tell Hi John to attend to the engines as soon as he goes off watch, then to get up to the bridge and stand by. Have you got the boat ready?"

"Aye, sir," assented Li Fu. "Plenty wate'; eve'ything leady."

"On your way, then!"

Barnes made his way to the bridge, where Hi John and two lascars were in charge, and passed behind the chart-house unremarked. Vanderhoof was not in evidence. Aboard the *Sulu Queen* the clear night was already insufferably warm, for she was steaming with the wind.

Passing to the centre starboard boat, Barnes found the cover loosely in place. He put in his few effects, then gave his attention to the lines. Like most old ships of a past genera-

tion, the steamer was equipped with Clifford's lowering gear, the most beautiful boat-gear ever devised, in theory, permitting a boat to be lowered by slacking a single line. This was the boat carried for use in emergencies. It was not stowed in chocks but was swung out and left clear, secured by gripes to a toggle which could be slipped in an instant.

"If we have luck she'll do," thought Barnes, examining the lowering line. "The pendants are new line and not swelled; we ought to get down without spilling. Hm! If anybody'd ever told me that I'd owe life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to this cursed ancient Clifford gear, I'd have called him a liar! But wait. We're not off yet by a long shot."

True enough.

An automatic in either side pocket of his jacket, Jim Barnes took over the bridge from Hi John as eight bells struck. Then dismay seized upon him. His own lack of foresight had brought on the crisis before he wanted or

expected it! Ellen Maggs and Nora Sayers were on the bridge. They had brought some personal effects, each in a small grip; and from the look cast at them by the departing lascar wheelmen, Barnes knew that suspicion was up.

Two fresh lascars came to the wheel, with Li Fu. Disregarding these, Barnes made a slight gesture to Hi John, who slipped out of sight instantly on his errand below. Unless the engines were disabled, Barnes knew that his preparations were of no avail. He greeted the two women with his usual air of cheerful assurance, however.

“All ready? Fine! The two quartermasters are with us. Come along, now, and climb into the boat—no time to lose, I assure you! In ten minutes this ship is going to be about the unhealthiest spot you ever heard of.”

He led them around the chart-house toward the boat.

“But the captain!” protested Nora Sayers.

"Surely, if you know there will be some trouble, the other officers——"

"Nix," said Barnes. "Good Lord, girl! Haven't you seen already what sort o' swine the others are? Hear that so-called wireless officer scream? He's still off his head—and couldn't send a message if he were sane. And the old man's soggy with opium. Here you are! Step on this water breaker, and over into her; she's solid."

Indeed, his words were given emphasis by the screaming of the wireless man, which had broken out anew down below. Miss Sayers stepped to the breaker, and Barnes helped her up into the boat. Then he turned, picked up Ellen Maggs bodily and lifted her over the edge, laughing as he did so.

"Got your pistol? Good. Sit tight, and don't scream when things bust loose. See you later."

He left them hurriedly and returned to the wheel, fighting down his appalling helplessness to prevent what was going to happen.

About the ship's officers he cared less than nothing; he was thinking now of the Arab woman and her brown children below. Abdullah might or might not protect them from the yellow fiends.

The tall figure of the serang rose at the starboard ladder. One glance from Li Fu told Barnes that this was the end. The two lascars were here to finish the quartermaster, and Gajah had come to attend to the second mate. The time was at hand.

Barnes went to the door of the chart-house. A shot would do the business, but he wanted no shooting up here if possible.

"Serang!" he exclaimed crisply. "Step aft. Something I want to show you."

That suited the Malay, who loosened his kris in its sheath and followed. At the corner of the chart-house, Barnes pointed across the deck, obscure in the starlight, to the boat.

"What's that?"

Sincerely astonished, Gajah peered at the boat, with the two women sitting in her. And

as he stared, Barnes let drive with the heavy barrel of his automatic, a full, fair blow across the skull. A grunt broke from the serang, who pitched sideways and flung out his arms. Barnes caught him and lowered the bleeding form to the deck, then darted back to the chart-house.

Just in time, too! For all his watchful care, Li Fu had been taken unawares, one of the lascars gripping him in both arms, the other with kris upraised for the blow. Barnes was in upon them unseen, and struck down the man with the kris. The other lascar leaped away, gained the far door of the chart-house—and ran into the arms of Hi John. Something happened there. Steel flashed and a man gasped; the lascar slipped to the deck quietly.

“You two men watch the ladders!” snapped Barnes. “When you hear me call, come to the boat.”

Revolvers out, each quartermaster took one of the ladders. Barnes turned and ran aft

along the deck at top speed, disregarding the low call that the two women sent after him as he passed the boat. He was listening desperately for sounds from below. They came to him, came all in a jumble that his brain sorted out mechanically. First came a jarring wrench that shook the whole ship. Then the engines stopped. Whatever Hi John had done, the work was effective. And at the same instant the night was split by a sudden cry.

“Allah! Allah——”

Then the screaming of the wireless man was cut very short. An oath of desperation on his lips, Jim Barnes gained the small after ladder that led to the stern of the main deck. From below him burst a storm of cries; the shriek of a woman, the staccato yells of men, and a thin, shrill wail that maddened him. He dropped to the deck below, and found himself in the midst of an inferno, clearly illuminated by the deck-lights.

Abdullah lay across his water-pipe, stab-

bed in the back. Nearby was his eldest child, also stabbed, and two lascars were fighting to take another child from the arms of its dying mother. Barnes saw only this much, and then began to fire. He forgot everything but the horror in front of him, and only laughed when several of the lascars began to converge on him.

A shot rang out from one of the forward cabins. Barnes, seizing the child, thrust him up the ladder and then swung about to meet three lascars plunging at him. He shot the first and second, ducked the kris-swing of the third, then tripped the man and shot him as he fell. Then he plunged for the nearest cabin, whence came screams.

Just what happened next is something of which Jim Barnes never speaks. The orders of Lim Tock, to make a clean sweep of Abdullah's family, were being followed to the letter. Barnes was in the cabin for fully a minute—which, just then, was a very long space of time.

By the time he emerged, much had happened. There was a crashing and smashing from the length of the cabins as the doors were battered in. From the bridge, a spatter of revolver shots; and, from below, more shots followed by the wild scream of the old chief as he reached the deck—a scream of half rage, half agony. He died at the rail, trailing blood across the deck, in his fist a blood-spattered spanner. After him, the Chinese stokers poured up to the deck and scattered for loot.

Jim Barnes came out of the cabin, thrusting a dead lascar ahead of him. About his neck clung one of Abdullah's daughters, and under his left arm was another. From the passage leaped a stoker, whom Barnes shot. Then, at the ladder, he urged the two little girls upward to join their brother above.

A shot rang out at him, and the bullet slithered on the steel beside him. Barnes paused to empty his automatics, then went up the ladder on the jump. At the top, he caught hold of the frightened children and rushed them

along, shouting as he did so to the two quartermasters.

They, after shooting at the forms down below on the foredeck and in the well, joined him at the boat. Barnes chucked in the three children and cast off the toggle.

"In with you, men, and lower away! I'll slide down the pendant. Where's your pistol, Ellen? Hand it over—thanks. Sit still, all of you! Lower, Li, lower! That's it——"

Li Fu slacked the lowering line about the cleat, and the boat fell away rapidly. Barely in time, too; Barnes perceived a rush of figures coming from the after ladder, and opened fire. They scattered.

There was a moment's breathing spell, while from fore and aft, aloft and aloft, rose sing-song calls in Cantonese and the harsher gutturals of the lascars. A rush was being planned from both sides.

Barnes caught a soft call from below, and breathed a prayer of thanks. A number of figures showed at the corner of the chart-

house. He emptied his pistol at these, then turned, caught one of the pendants hitched to the davit-head, and let himself go sliding down.

A burst of yells rang out from the bridge deck, but he was in the boat below ere any could reach the rail. The two quartermasters had already put out the oars, and Barnes cast off the line and let the pendants unreeve as the roller whirled. The boat started away from the ship's side.

"Here," came a voice, and Barnes felt one of his own pistols shoved into his hand. "My clip fitted your automatic and——"

"Good girl, Ellen!" he cried out, and laughed as he fired at the rail above. A shot made answer, and a kris sang through the air to splash alongside—but the boat was clear. She drew away from the ship before the mutineers were sure just what had happened.

IV

THERE'S one good thing we can say for the *Sulu Queen*," observed Jim Barnes. "That is, she sailed under English board rules."

"What has that to do with our present situation?" demanded Nora Sayers.

"It means that we've got a sprit rig stowed aboard. In oars, men! Hi John, we'll be sailing before the wind, so lash your oar to the for'ard thwart to make a boom for the fores'l. Li Fu, break out the canvas. Get the mast stepped, then trim ship."

Over the waves behind, the tumult had died, and the distant lights of the *Sulu Queen* showed only when the boat lifted on a crest. No pursuit had been made, nor had the searchlight been put into effect. Seemingly, Lim Tock was making no effort to find the

boat. Probably the supercargo was for the present unable to get his men in hand and was also very likely to be busy getting the engines into working order.

When the centreboard was let down and the boat was being trimmed, Jim Barnes surveyed her with acute satisfaction. She was a nearly new whaleboat, fitted with a rudder in navy style, and well found in all respects. With a grunt of delight, Barnes opened the oiled silk wrapping of the matches, found the compass to be a good one, and set it by his side in the stern. In another ten minutes the sprit was up, the foresail rigged to the makeshift boom, and the whaleboat was running before the wind toward Borneo.

The eldest of the three children was barely six; none of them were cognizant of what had happened. After whimpering a little, they were soon asleep amidships, wrapped in the spare sail.

“If you girls will come aft, you can curl up in the bottom of the boat at my feet,” said

Barnes. "You'll be out of the wind and she'll be better trimmed. I've kept the boat well wet down since we sailed, and she's dry as a bone."

The two women obeyed. Nora Sayers looked up at Barnes.

"The other children? And their mother?"

Barnes tried to speak, but his throat was suddenly dry.

"I—damn it, girl, don't make me think of it! I did what I could. Go to sleep."

Ellen Maggs caught her breath sharply. Then, after a moment, Barnes felt her hand touch his, and he gripped her fingers. Both women were crying, he thought; but after a little they fell quiet, lulled by the regular rise and fall of the boat, by the long forward sweep, the rush and hiss of water as she drove along on a crest, and the tilted drop into the trough only to gather impetus anew and hurl forward.

The curling sweep of wind and sea, like a cleansing breath, wiped out all that was be-

hind them and lessened the sharp memory. Once Barnes, looking back, saw a searchlight fingering the water; that was all. The stars blazed cold and brilliant, and the thin crescent of the new moon hung like green silver against the depths above. So passed the hours, and the boat rushed ever onward and onward under the steady sweep of wind. Barnes held her on the same course the *Sulu Queen* had been following, to make the Bornean coast. They were far out of any steamer track, and there was no hope of being picked up unless by some chance trading schooner.

Dawn found them steadily bowling along. Li Fu had crept aft and relieved Barnes of the tiller; and Barnes, resting against the stern-thwart, opened his eyes to find the head of Ellen Maggs pillowed upon his shirt, and his arms about her shoulders. How this had come about, he had not the least idea, but made no objection to the arrangement.

Perhaps aroused by his awakening stir, the girl opened her eyes a moment later. Nora

Sayers was sleeping peacefully. Barnes felt Ellen Maggs catch her breath at sight of the ocean and sky that closed them in, then saw the color come into her cheeks. Before she turned to glance at him, he closed his eyes again. She did not move, but, after realizing the situation, accepted it. Above them the lean form of Li Fu crouched at the tiller, dark eyes sweeping the water ahead.

"Awake?" asked Barnes after a moment. "Don't move. Sailing a whaleboat before the wind, even with a centreboard, is about as ticklish as canoeing. Comfortable?"

"Very, thank you," she responded, although he could see that the color lingered in her cheeks.

"When the kids wake up, we'll stretch our legs a bit and break out some grub," said Barnes. She was silent for a space, then spoke quietly.

"Are we going anywhere? Have you seen any ship, or will any see us?"

"Going to Borneo. We'll raise the coast

as soon as the sun's up. We won't see any ship unless she sees us first, however."

"But I thought we might see one, and catch her attention——"

Jim Barnes chuckled at this.

"No chance! Novels to the contrary, it just ain't done. A small boat has a horizon of two and a half miles. We could see another boat a mile farther. The bridge of a ship can see us fifteen miles away, and would be sure not to miss our sails. So by the time we saw a ship, she'd be bearing down to take us on board. But we'll not see any; we're way out of the steamer lane."

Behind the boat, all the eastern sky reddened and streamed with the dawn-shafts, and the sun sprang suddenly from the sea-rim, piercing the haze and mist of dawn with his level rays of gold. Li Fu bent down and touched the shoulder of Barnes. The latter looked. Out ahead of them a purple mass was upheaved above the horizon, running north and south.

"Look!" Barnes pointed it out to the girl. "There's Borneo. If the wind holds, we'll make the coast in a couple of hours. The wind's shifting around to the north, too. Wake up, Hi John! Take in your boom, bring the sheet aft, and let the foresail gybe. Mind your helm, Li Fu, as she wears——"

The whaleboat came over nicely, but as she heeled the three children wakened and began to cry out. Nora Sayers sat up, bewildered, then quickly began to mother the little ones. Hi John came aft and relieved Li Fu, who, with Barnes, set to work breaking out the cabin stores put aboard the boat.

When breakfast was somewhat precariously made an end of, Barnes turned over the forward portion of the boat to the two women and their charges, bringing the quartermasters back in the stern with him. With the spare sail he contrived a low screen which afforded the women some privacy without lessening the windage of the sails.

Li Fu curled up to sleep, but Hi John, with

a serious effort to improve his English, questioned Barnes about their course and then delivered himself of a matter which drew Barnes' immediate and earnest attention.

The quartermaster had discovered that the captain had changed the course of the *Sulu Queen* toward Borneo by reason of something the serang Gajah had said to him. Further, he knew that there was much opium on the steamer, which Lim Tock meant to transfer to a junk which was to meet her somewhere. Putting these facts together, the inference was that the *Sulu Queen* was to meet the junk somewhere near the mouth of the Sesajap, for which the skipper had headed her.

"I don't know but what you're right, John," said Barnes thoughtfully. "We might run into that junk, eh? But no great matter if we did. They'd be Chinese and would leave us alone."

Hi John shook his head at this. The boat was stenciled with the name of the *Sulu*

Queen, and the men aboard the junk would not be exactly fools. Barnes nodded assent.

"You're right. Still, the chances are ten to one that we'll not see her. How badly did you smash those engines? What did you do to them?"

"Me no savvy," said the quartermaster with a shrug. He had smashed them, and that was all he knew, except that he had done it in a hurry and at considerable risk.

Jim Barnes had fetched along no charts, but needed none for this coast. To the north was Point Elphinstone and British territory, and no settlements along the coast. To the south were several Dutch stations within a hundred miles or so. As Hi John claimed to know the coast fairly well, Barnes decided to run straight in for the land, if possible identify their position, and then strike south for the nearest Dutch settlement. The boat was staunch; the storm season was gone, and there was nothing to fear.

"And the quicker I can get a gunboat after

that devil, Lim Tock, the better!" reflected Barnes. He still saw red at thought of what he had witnessed the previous night.

An hour passed, and another, and the coast opened up before them as the breeze held. The mountains of the interior rose in a dull purple mass, against which stood the brighter green of the low shores. An island presently detached itself to the north, and after studying the coast-line carefully, Hi John declared this to be Bunju, with the island of Tarakan a little off the port bow. South of Tarakan were Dutch posts on the Bulangan River mouths, so Barnes let her fall off a little, heading southeast by east.

The children, meantime, had begun to explore, and two of them appeared aft, staring at the three men with wondering brown eyes, but too shy to talk. Barnes was paying little heed to them; both he and Hi John were examining the coast ahead. Then, suddenly, Li Fu uncurled, and came out of his sleep with a blood-curdling yell.

For an instant Barnes thought the quartermaster had gone mad, until he saw the man staring at the wet leg of his dungaree trousers. Wet! A chattering cry from Li Fu drove the warning home. He plunged forward.

“Drop it, you little rascal! Drop it!”

It was one of those slight accidents upon which destiny hangs and veers. The Arab boy had found the lanyard of the plug in the boat's bottom, and now stood holding up the plug curiously while the water spouted into her.

At the cry and plunge of Barnes, the boy scrambled away forward. Nora Sayers came aft, and ran into him. They fell together, just as Barnes flung himself on the plug and attempted to replace it. Hi John, too startled to mind his helm properly, let her yaw on the crest of a wave—and the big mainsail gybed.

Barnes, who had jammed the plug back into place, thought she was gone; but the

water that she had shipped saved her in that instant. The mast, bone-dry and rotten, went with a rending crash, smashing the sprit with it. She swept up on the next sea with a pile of canvas dragging over her bow and the frightened children screaming.

Seizing Li Fu's knife, Barnes went into the tangle furiously, for somewhere beneath it was Ellen Maggs. He found her unhurt, however, her arms about the youngest child.

"Lord, girl! I thought the mast had hit you. Get aft, now. Both of you girls take pannikins and bail. Li, put out an oar and keep her from broaching. John, come along and help clear away. Move sharp, everybody!"

In five minutes the dripping canvas was hauled in amidships and the damage ascertained. The sprit was gone beyond repair, and the upper half of the mast. Against the stump, Barnes held an oar while Hi John deftly lashed it in place.

"What happened?" demanded Nora Sayers.

"We all picked the lee side to fall on," and Barnes laughed as he spoke. "Cheer up! No harm done! We'll run into shore and replace the spars, then be on our way. Eh, John?"

"Can do," grunted Hi John, examining the coast line. "Plenty bamboo. Hey! Catchum sail off sta'board counter!"

Barnes leaped to a thwart and took one look to the north. A brown, square sail was in sight, creeping from behind one of the islands. He turned.

"Now, John, move! Get that canvas up, anyway at all so it'll draw—come on! Use that long piece of the sprit for a gaff; lash the canvas to it and then lash it as high on the oar as you can. Look alive! That's your junk, yonder."

The two men fell furiously to work, while the women bailed and Li Fu tugged at the long oar to keep the whaleboat from broaching. And the brownish yellow matting sail crept down on them like an ungainly water-spider.

V

UNDER the rapid directions of Barnes, the whaleboat was presently surging through the water again, while he took the tiller and the quartermasters finished the bailing. Both women sat a bit aft to trim the boat anew; and, as they had worked diligently at Cantonese while fitting themselves for mission duties, they understood the tongue more or less. Neither of the quartermasters was aware of the fact. Barnes spoke it not at all.

“Our master is in love with this drooping girl,” said Li Fu chantingly, as he bailed. “Lim Tock desired her also. She must have a devil that charms some men, for she is of no beauty in my eyes.”

Hi John laughed harshly. “If those aboard the junk see the women, they will try hard for us! Lim Tock was a Straits man; to him

white women are beautiful. These others are Straits men, too, I think. Women are more desirable than gold, and white women than pearls; for white women are hard to come by in Singapore, unless one——”

He went on to speak learnedly of matters which, by good fortune, came in words that the two women had not learned. As it was, they gave each other a startled glance. Then Ellen Maggs motioned to the spare sail.

“Get it, Nora. Lie down and pull it over us.”

Barnes saw the action, and his eyes narrowed perplexedly. Then he understood, and a smile touched his lips.

“Good work, girls! Get the kids with you. Li and John, lie down here by the after thwart, in the trough of the next wave. Chances are they won't have very good glasses aboard the junk. We'll puzzle 'em a bit and make 'em suspicious.”

Once again the slender accident upon which hangs fortune! Although the junk

was at least three miles from them, Barnes had swiftly estimated her course and sailing power, and had come to the desperate conclusion that she meant to intercept them and would do so before they could make the shore. Her large forward and smaller after sail were putting her through the water almost dead before the wind at a fast clip.

Now, when the whaleboat rose to the following seas, she presented the spectacle of a boat under jury rig manned by a single figure in the stern. Other figures had been aboard her; now they were gone. To those on the junk, familiar with the artifices of Malay and Dyak, familiar with theft and murder and piracy by quiet lagoon and hidden river-mouth, it was obvious that the thirty-foot whaleboat wished them to think only one person was aboard. The others might be lying hidden with weapons ready under mats and sails—as they were.

Jim Barnes hauled in his sheets until the whaleboat began to heel, and headed up more

directly for the shore, sailing by the wind and getting every possible fraction of speed out of her. Watching narrowly, he saw the brown matting sail braced around. The junk altered her course slightly, to run past the stern of the whaleboat and reconnoitre.

“Good!” he exclaimed, with a breath of relief. “We’ve won—he’s frightened! Everybody stay close, now. We don’t want her to learn too much. Li Fu, feel around there and pass me up the crutch for the steering oar, and you, John, have one of the oars ready. I’ll ship the crutch and get out the oar. That’ll give us better steering power and add a bit to our speed. We’ll need the oar in the surf, if there is any.”

Five minutes later the change was made and Barnes stood up to the long oar, which kept the boat from yawing and thus aided her progress. Her makeshift rig was holding and promised to effect its purpose.

So it did, indeed. Another twenty minutes made so plain to the junk that the whaleboat

could not be intercepted, that she hauled about and stood off-shore, giving up the chase entirely. Barnes jubilantly conveyed the news to all hands, but added a warning word.

“Stay where you are! We don’t want her coming in later to investigate us. John, stand by the centreboard and haul up when I give the word. There’s a lagoon ahead, and we may find a bar at the entrance. No sign of any, but that don’t always signify——”

He craned anxiously forward as he stood, examining the shores upon which they were sweeping. They were low and unhealthy. From the water ascended a line, a tangled cluster of mangrove roots twisted like frozen snakes, with the green wall above. Here and there, however, openings showed that behind these islets lay long lagoons. For one of these openings Barnes steered, forced to take chances on striking a sandbar. He looked back from a crest and found the brown sail dipping under the horizon.

"All clear! Come alive! Ready for a shock if she strikes, girls. Haul in, John! That's the ticket!"

In between the trees they rushed on a white foam-crest, swept past, and went darting across the quiet surface of a lagoon, the sails flapping. A hundred yards in width it was, the mangrove wall on one side, and on the other a strip of white sand with jungle greenery making another wall to shut off the sky. The boat glided gently across and drifted until her nose touched the sand. With a breath of relief, Barnes dropped his oar.

Then the heat smote them, blazing, torrential, insufferable. There in the quiet lagoon, cut off from wind and sea, the sun beat down unchecked. Nora Sayers, coming to her feet, glanced at the watch on her wrist and uttered a cry of surprise.

"Good gracious! Do you know that it's nearly noon? No wonder it's hot——"

"Sit down!" ordered Barnes. "Pull her up, lads."

Leaping into the water, the quartermasters pulled the nose of the whaleboat to the sand and helped the two women and the children out.

“All ashore!” sang out Barnes. “Li Fu, you and John cut a new mast and sprit. Bamboo, if you can find it; if not, whatever you can get. Miss Sayers, keep your eye on the kids, will you? Miss—er—Ellen, will you take this stuff as I hand it out? We’ll use the spare canvas for table-cloth, and have a bang-up feed to celebrate. You girls are getting your money’s worth this cruise! How do you like Borneo?”

Nora Sayers had no time to answer, for the three brown children had promptly stripped and were plunging through the water or catching sand-fleas, and she was in laughing pursuit. Ellen Maggs smiled as she took the provisions that Barnes handed out.

“I—why, I like it!” she said, her eyes big with wonder at the things around, and spark-

ling with eagerness. "I'm frightened, and happy, and—don't want to go back! Are there any savages around?"

"Probably a few head-hunters, but they won't worry us. Here's a tin of sardines."

With her next load the girl was laughing at sight of Nora Sayers rounding up her charges.

"I wish we could do that, too! The water looks so clean and the sand so white."

"Nothing to prevent," said Barnes, chuckling. "After lunch we'll get the boat rigged. You and Nora can slip up around that point, take the kids along and enjoy life. No sharks of any size in here, and no crocodiles in salt water, I guess. You might catch a stingaree, but not much chance. While you're gone, I'll have a dip myself."

Nora Sayers and the excited, chattering brown children rejoined them, and presently their noon meal was ready. Barnes sent up a call, which was answered from the depths of the green jungle, but the meal was half over

when Li Fu and Hi John appeared. They were hot and bedraggled, but exultantly produced two admirable spars of bamboo, each of the right size, for mast and sprit.

Nora Sayers, energetic and vigorous despite the heat, went exploring and announced the discovery of a little cove, just around a sandy point. So, taking the children, she and Ellen Maggs presently departed thither, and the joyful shrieks of splashing youngsters soon echoed through the lagoon.

Jim Barnes lighted his pipe and fell to work on the spars, at which the quartermasters joined him after their meal. It was no light job, since he was determined to have everything shipshape for the proper handling of the boat, and the sheath-knives made slow work of the fibrous bamboo. It was an hour before the mast was stepped and rigged to his satisfaction. Then he enjoyed a quick dip, and was dressed again when the others returned. The Chinese went in search of crabs, to vary their diet.

The two women found Barnes sitting on the

sand, his pipe alight and a frown on his face, as he studied the opposite shore of the lagoon.

"Are you all ready to get off?" asked Nora.

"Ready and waiting." Barnes grinned cheerfully. "Look at the channel over there, by which we came in. Notice anything funny about it?"

Both women looked, perplexed, but could find no explanation of his words. Barnes pointed to the sand about the bow of the boat.

"There's the answer, girls. Tide! It must have been on the ebb when we got here. Now she's gone down, and there isn't three inches of water over the bar. We're stuck until about five o'clock, that's all! I'm taking no chances with a thin-skinned whaleboat."

"We can't get out, then?" queried Ellen Maggs.

"Right. We can fish and sew and smoke and talk, and hunt crabs, but we can't leave. By four or five o'clock we may scrape over. Why worry? We're a lot better off than we might have been. Not often you strike a sand beach along these mangrove swamps, I

can tell you! We'll stretch the spare sail as an awning for the kids and let 'em sleep."

Using the broken spars, and Nora Sayers aiding him, he stretched the canvas from the side of the boat and the three children were soon asleep in the shade. Retiring to the edge of the trees, the three awaited the return of the quartermasters. Barnes sighed luxuriously.

"Golly! This is the first vacation I've had in a long while. Hope you girls won't lose your jobs if you don't get back to China on schedule?"

"I guess not," said Ellen Maggs. "What brought you on that awful ship, Mr. Barnes?"

Barnes gave her a look of whimsical reproach.

"Now, now, I'm surprised at you! My name isn't Mister—it's Jim! Make believe we're on a desert isle, can't you?"

Ellen Maggs blushed faintly, but her eyes were sparkling when she responded.

"All right—Jim! Now what brought you on that ship?"

"Fate," said Jim Barnes, grinning. "Do you girls remember that morning you came into the consul's office in Hong Kong?"

Both women glanced at him, surprised.

"Were you there?" demanded Nora Sayers. "We didn't see you?"

"I was there when you left, after talking with the consul about the *Sulu Queen*," he responded. "You were too excited to notice me, though. The consul's a good sport. He knew the old hooker was no ship for me, but he said you girls were stubborn and were going to take the trip aboard her——"

"The rates," put in Ellen Maggs meekly, "were half what the other steamers wanted.

"Sure. So's the pay they offered me. 'You go along on that houseboat of corruption, Barnes,' the consul said. 'She needs a second, and there ought to be one white man aboard her if those fool girls are determined to sail.' So, having seen you girls, I agreed with him—and here we are! And believe me, I'm tickled to death that I shipped aboard her."

"So am I," said Nora Sayers laughing

frankly. Ellen Maggs said nothing at all, but Barnes caught a look from her eyes that set his pulses leaping.

Li Fu and Hi John returned with a mighty loot of crabs and sea-slugs garnered from the outer reef, and reported that no sail was in sight, nor was any trail of smoke along the horizon. While the women shudderingly eyed the hideous slugs and the children poked at them with sticks, Barnes got a fire going from dry driftwood and the crab-meat was cooked. The two Chinese squatted over another fire and prepared the slugs after their own fashion.

The repast was flavored with curiosity rather than hunger. By the time it was done, Nora Sayers announced the hour as nearly four. Jim Barnes glanced out at the bar, and nodded. The tide was creeping in.

"All aboard! We'll try it, anyhow. Unship the tiller, Li! She steers and handles much better with the oar."

Thankful to escape from the unstirred,

stagnant heat of the lagoon, the women and children were aided into the boat after it had been shoved clear. Barnes took the stern; the quartermasters ran her out and leaped aboard, getting out oars.

"Wind's going down outside," announced Barnes, as they neared the opening. "We'll keep along the coast during the night, however, and with morning ought to run into some native fishing boats. We can soon find where the nearest Dutch post is located. Here we are, now! In oars, men! Stand by the centreboard, John. Li Fu, take care of the sheets!"

The boat's keel touched the mud of the bar lightly, very lightly, and then was over. There had been surf in the morning, but now it was gone, except for a line of breakers fifty feet away. The sails caught the breeze, the boat heeled over, and a moment later Barnes luffed and drove her through the surf, to fall away on the other tack and head out to the southward.

Then, as he stood watching the sails, his eyes widened. Before him, seemingly without cause, had appeared a little round hole in the mainsail. An instant later the crack of a rifle came on the wind. He turned, as a shout broke from Li Fu, and perceived what none of them had observed in the moment of getting through the surf.

Half a mile to the north along the mangrove reef was the same junk they had encountered earlier in the day; and, between her and them, bearing down upon them and booming along with the breeze, were three ship's boats with canvas set.

"Our boats!" cried Jim Barnes. "They sank the ship and came along in the boats. Down, everybody! John, get those water breakers aft to trim ship. Down!"

Another rifle-crack emphasized his words, and then the sharp song of the bullet whining overhead, followed by a chorus of yells from the three boats.

VI

BARNES stood at the steering oar, holding the long ash deep and giving the whaleboat every ounce of windage that would drive her forward. Shot after shot rang out from the pursuing boats, which were filled with men.

He could picture well enough what had happened. Lim Tock, unable to repair the smashed engines of the *Sulu Queen*, had sunk her. Into the boats had piled the lascars and the yellow men, with their loot and opium, and started for the coast. They must have met the junk during the day, put the loot aboard her, heard of the whaleboat, and had come to seek her. Lim Tock would not dare to let her escape to carry tales.

“And now they’ve found us right enough!” he thought. “Caught us, confound it! If

they didn't have rifles, I'd run out to sea and fight 'em with seamanship. Those lascars can't begin to handle whaleboats. If we only had a good mile between us! But the wind's falling. It'll die out, and won't come up again until after sunset. And by that time they'll crawl up on us with the oars. Damn it!"

The bullets droned overhead. One man at a time seemed to be firing until his magazine emptied. There were good shots among the pursuers, too; several holes were visible in the mainsail, and twice Barnes had felt hot lead come close. It dawned upon him that they were firing at his figure.

"Are we beating them?" called Nora Sayers.

"No," said Barnes grimly. In his appraisal he found the case hopeless, desperate; and he put it bluntly enough, explaining that the oarsmen aboard the pursuing boats, and the calm that was certain to fall, insured their being overtaken. The Chinese listened

calmly, with clear understanding; the two women comprehending well enough, but urging him desperately with their eyes.

The whaleboat was reaching out on the starboard tack, as she had left the lagoon opening. The land fell away to the southwest, so that she was standing practically out to sea while running almost before the wind.

"We'll have to run for the land, and do it quick," said Barnes. "We don't dare to tack; we'll have to wear. The breeze is still pretty fresh, and they're apparently badly out of trim; good! Now you'll see some fun, girls. I'll bet a trade dollar that one of 'em gets spilled. Nora, come a bit aft and sit on the lee thwart—that's right. Revolvers loaded, men?"

The quartermasters answered with a nod. Barnes commanded Li Fu to stand by the fore sheet and, when the helm was put up, to empty his weapon at the nearest of the three boats.

"You take charge of the main sheet, John. Those lascars will imitate us, and we'll give

'em something to imitate, or I'm a Dutchman! All right, John—slack away, roundly! Haul in—haul in! Let her gybe, now—smart does it! Ease away, now——”

The staccato reports of Li Fu's revolver cracked emptily down the wind. The boat went off before the wind, and the mainsail was hauled in and gybed dangerously, then was eased away as she paid off on the new tack. Li Fu, dropping his weapon, handled the fore sheet smartly to meet her by the wind.

A jubilant yell broke from Barnes as he glanced backward. The foremost pursuer, confused by Li Fu's bullets, tried to wear hastily and suddenly. Her mainsail hauled around in a terrific jibe that sent her flat over. Heads dotted the water about the craft, but the other two boats managed the trick safely and stood away without halting to pick up their companions. A renewed rifle-fire opened from them.

“Fire and be damned to you!” shouted Barnes in delight. “If I had you out at sea

and the wind steady, I'd show you tricks, you dogs! That's one of you gone, and the junk will be delayed picking up——”

The words seemed suddenly checked on his lips; a grunt broke from him, an abrupt ejaculation of surprise and almost alarm. The occasion of it did not appear.

“Can either of you men steer with the oar?” he demanded.

Li Fu shook his head. Hi John assented with a nod, and Barnes beckoned him. Picking his way aft, Hi John took over the oar.

“You see that point dead ahead, with what seems to be a river-mouth on the other side? Head for it, or a couple of points to starboard of it to allow for leeway. And make the river, John—good man——”

. Barnes spoke jerkily. For an instant he changed countenance; an expression of agony leaped across his face. He started forward. A cry broke from Ellen Maggs.

“Catch him, Li Fu!”

But Jim Barnes sank down on the thwart

beside Nora Sayers, and, smiling a little, reached up one of his automatics to Li Fu.

"Here, Li! Go aft to keep her trimmed, and let 'em have it. Fire low; those bullets will smash through the boat."

Li Fu stepped past him. Barnes, disregarding the hand of Nora Sayers, lifted himself forward a little and dropped near the bow thwart, beside Ellen Maggs. The three children were up in the bow, chattering away and delighted with the chase.

"You're hurt?" cried Ellen Maggs, leaning toward Barnes. He laughed lightly, though his lips were graying, as he looked into her eyes.

"Aye. Nora, pass up that little black medicine chest, will you? It's stowed under your thwart, I think, with the lantern and other stuff that was in the boat. Does either of you girls know anything about surgery?"

"I do," said Ellen Maggs. Her cheeks were very white, her eyes large. "Only a little——"

Barnes put his hand under his shirt and ex-

amined his side gingerly. Then, with a grimace, he wriggled out of his jacket. He took the sheath-knife which Li Fu tossed forward on demand, and cut at the right side of his shirt. Nora Sayers, her face drawn and anxious, would have come with the medicine case, but Barnes checked her.

"Stay where you are, Nora. We're fighting to reach land ahead of those devils, and every bit of trim to the boat counts a lot. Throw it; that's right. Now Ellen, the bullet went in under the right arm and is bulging out the skin here on my right side. Cut the skin and it'll pop out. I'm not left-handed or I could do it. Then douse on plenty of iodine fore and aft, and clap on some kind of a bandage."

He lay back and threw up his arms, gripping the corks outside the gunwale, and so lay motionless, waiting. The girl leaned forward, her lips clenched.

"Don't worry; it won't hurt," he said easily. "You, Li Fu! Open up. Are they gaining on us, or holding steady?"

"Plenty steady," responded the quartermaster. At the next wave-crest he fired.

His feet braced, Barnes lay motionless, and a smile crept to his pallid lips as he noted the deft certainty with which the girl attacked her task. Twice she started to cut, and flinched; then, desperately, she set the keen steel to the white skin. In five seconds it was done. The bullet fell from her reddened fingers and bounced on the thin sheathing.

"Steady, steady!" said Barnes quietly, seeing her lips quiver. "Now the smelly stuff and the bandages, girl." A sudden exclamation from the Chinese made him glance up. "What is it, men? What is it?"

"That last shot plenty damn good, first-chop!" responded Li Fu, staring out. "Hai! Catchum bottomside one time!"

"Fine work!" cried Barnes. "That's two out of the race. Ripped through her sheathing, eh? Anybody hurt?"

"My no can see—catchum one damn coolie, mebbeso. Bail like hellee!"

"Good! Do the same to the other boat if you can."

"Can do," asserted Li Fu confidently, but he failed to make good his promise. The one shot that caused one of the two pursuers to limp behind was doubtless sheer luck.

"Turn over, please," came the voice of Ellen Maggs.

Barnes obeyed. The girl caught her breath as his blood-soaked back was revealed, while Nora Sayers leaned forward and directed her, aiding as best she could.

"How's the wind?" demanded Barnes, while the bandage was being wrapped in place.

"Go down plenty quick," responded Li Fu, examining the empty weapon. "No can do. I think Lim Tock in this boat. Plenty joss."

"Huh! Joss won't save him if I get a good crack at the devil," commented Barnes, as he lay face-down. "Going to make the river, John?"

"Aye. Can do."

"It's done," said Ellen Maggs, her voice very faint.

Barnes lifted himself stiffly and sat up. He saw the girl smile tremulously. Then her face went ashen and she dropped back against the lee gunwale and lay quiet. Barnes looked up at Nora Sayers.

"Leave her be," he said quietly. "Poor girl! Must have been hell for her."

"It was," agreed Nora Sayers, regarding him almost savagely. "Why didn't you let me do it? She wasn't made for that sort of thing, although she's a wonderful surgical assistant. I saw her faint twice, one morning at Tientsin, when they were working on the wounded men. She ought to be cooking and tending babies, instead of messing around blood and wounds!"

"Good lord, don't take it out on me!" said Barnes, and smiled a little. "I didn't send her out to China, did I? But it won't be my fault if she ever goes back, I can tell you that! Come on, swap places with me and mother her a bit. I've got to see what's doing. We've

got a darned slim chance even if we do get ashore, and we can't overlook any bets."

He dragged himself painfully to the thwart, Nora Sayers aiding him. Then, as he sat up, she took the head of Ellen Maggs in her lap.

To his infinite relief, Barnes perceived that they were more than holding their own in the chase, and, if the wind had held, might have run for it successfully. But the wind would not hold. Already it was dying out. Looking back, he could see the brown matting sails of the junk flapping idly as she lay to, picking up the men from the capsized boat. The second boat, half submerged, was heading back for her.

Only the third boat held on its course. As nearly as Barnes could tell, there were a dozen men aboard her, but without glasses he could not distinguish figures to the extent of identifying them. He took the empty weapon from Li Fu and began to reload.

"None too many cartridges left; we didn't figure on a little war," he commented, and turned his attention to the shore.

A breath of relief escaped him. The shore was a scant quarter-mile away, and the wind would get them to it. Hi John had made the promontory, a low, mangrove-rimmed tongue of land, and was heading toward the river-mouth which had disclosed itself beyond. The stream was one of some size, thickly girt by trees and jungle.

A single line of surf, breaking across the bar, was divided by a small, narrow island of white sand, where a few trees struggled. With extra high tides the island would be covered, Barnes decided, but not at present.

"Right-hand channel, John," he directed. "Then beach her on that island. If we don't get that boat stopped, she'll do for us; but we can stop her. Ellen waked up yet?"

"Not yet," said Nora Sayers.

"Then leave her alone. The next ten minutes tells the tale. Give me that gun of hers."

The girl obeyed. A shrill cry from Hi John heralded the surf-line, and as the boat rose to it, the sail began to flap. The wind was down.

VII

SUNSET was at hand. The red ball of the sun, blurred out of rotundity by the haze, hovered at the purple rim of the western mountains as though hesitating to depart.

The boat was through the surf, carried forward by the white crest in a surging rush. A last puff of wind filled her sails and gave her way enough to get over the bar and go in upon the sandy shore of the islet. Here the trees and brush, while nothing like the tangled mass of jungle ashore, were thick enough to afford concealment. This was not the aim of Barnes, however.

“Haul her up, lads!” To his order the quartermasters leaped out. “You girls stay here and keep the kids quiet. If they have the nerve to rush, we’re gone; but they won’t. Here, John, give me a hand! Quick!”

He was helped ashore, finding himself very weak but clear-headed. Each of the Chinese had a revolver. Barnes had two automatics and the one belonging to Ellen. He gave his directions swiftly, and the two men darted into the brush. Barnes leaned against the nearest tree and waited, watching the canvas of the pursuing boat come flying in with the last dregs of the breeze.

At last she came, rising on the gathering surge of the breaking surf, bow flinging high, steersman standing at the straining oar in the stern. As she lifted against the flaming sky, Barnes threw up his automatic and fired. The oarsman crumpled up. From three points the islet spat bullets at the nearing boat, sweeping her with the hot lead.

By some miracle, the expected did not happen. Instead of capsizing, the boat swept in on the surf, and paused. A rifle spat response vainly. Men were tumbling, falling over the thwarts, shrieking and yelling oaths. The figure of Lim Tock, in the bow, stag-

gered and went down, but his voice pierced through the din continually.

An oar was put out, and another. Of the dozen men aboard her, not half survived that blasting welcome. Revolvers and pistols had been emptied. Frantically the gasping men got the boat headed around to meet the surf. Two more oars jabbed out. Barnes lifted Ellen Maggs' pistol and shot with deliberate aim. Two of the oarsmen sprawled down. Somehow the boat crawled out again, in an interval of the surf, and began to draw away. Barnes, disappointed and raging, emptied his last bullets at her. For a while she floated there, until the oars bit at the water and pulled her slowly away.

"Damn it!" said Barnes bitterly, as the quartermasters came back, reloading. "Came within an ace of capsizing him; came within an ace of getting him and bagging his rifles! And missed. Now we've lost the whole trick after all."

"Plenty joss along Lim Tock," commented Hi John.

Barnes wearily turned to the boat and seated himself on the gunwale, while at his order the two men unshipped the spars and canvas. Ellen Maggs still lay unconscious, her head in the lap of Nora Sayers, who was looking up at Barnes with glad eyes.

"We've won? You beat them off?"

Barnes mechanically felt for his pipe, filled it, and held a match to it.

"No," he said, his voice bitter. "We'd have won if we'd got their rifles and killed that devil, Lim Tock. We only drove him off—and we've lost, absolutely. Leave the spars here ashore, John; put the canvas aboard—that's right. Lay her on the canvas, Nora, and take it easy. You'll need the sails for a covering against the night-mist."

When she had made the unconscious girl comfortable with the canvas, Nora Sayers rose and stepped ashore, where the three children were already ranging happily.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.
"How have we lost?"

Barnes jerked his pipe to seaward.

"They're bound to silence us at all costs, aren't they? Sure. They've plenty of men aboard the junk and those other boats. It'll probably remain calm until sunrise, now, and we can't possibly get to sea. We can use only two oars. The inference is obvious."

She could not mistake it, and nodded slowly. Barnes turned to the two Chinese.

"Any idea where we are, John?"

Hi John nodded, and squatted in the sand with a stick. In the sand he drew several converging lines, designed to represent the delta and mouths of a large river. He pointed to one, then indicated the river beside them.

"I think Bulungan River," he said. "We go up, bimeby we come topside. Big river."

"You may be right, John—and look here! There's a Dutch post somewhere up the Bulungan——"

"Two," said the quartermaster. "Plenty big river, topside."

Barnes looked at the recumbent figure of

Ellen Maggs in the boat, looked at the three children playing in the sand. In the warm, clear light of the sunset, the perplexed frown of his face was plain to be seen. He looked anxious, yet his blue eyes were stormy and filled with a passionate anger as though he were rebelling against something that he saw was unavoidable. He came to his feet and paused.

“Dutch posts?” cried Nora Sayers eagerly. “Then we can row up the river!”

Barnes looked at her, and under the regard of his eyes she fell silent.

“Yes, you can,” he said. “Sure. And so can those devils, unless there’s something right here to stop ’em! Besides, it’s a long chance. We don’t know for sure that it’s the Bulungan River, or one of the mouths. That’s the devil of destiny; it never gives a man a fair show for his white alley! The cards are stacked every time.”

He glanced at the sky. There was yet half an hour of daylight, for the sun was down be-

hind the western mountains of Borneo, and the afterglow would linger for a while.

"You mean," questioned the girl, "that they can row so much faster than we can?"

"Exactly. A dozen oars to our two. The Dutch posts, if they're here, are probably miles up-river. They are trading posts, you know, in touch with the natives. We might hide somewhere along the river, only to die slowly. Lim Tock will search every inch of the stream, you may be sure. His own life depends on it."

"If we could get a messenger up the river _____"

"Yes," said Barnes, and laughed. Nora Sayers bit her lip.

For a moment he puffed at his pipe, then drew a deep breath and beckoned the two quartermasters. They came, watching his face calmly, without emotion.

"You men will take this boat and row up the stream," he said quietly. "I confide to your care these two women, and these chil-

dren. You are to protect them at all costs. This is——”

“But—wait!” exclaimed Nora Sayers in dismay.

“Shut up!” snapped Barnes. “Now, men, this is your duty. They must be taken up to the Dutch post, wherever it is. It means you must row most of the night, understand? I shall remain here and stop Lim Tock’s men. I’m no good for rowing—and I can do that. Now, do you understand?”

“My savvy. Aye,” they responded together.

“Good. Get to work and lighten the boat, then.”

Barnes put his pipe between his teeth and stepped toward the trees. He found himself halted, the girl’s hand on his arm. He turned, and was astonished by the emotion that was in her face and eyes.

“Please!” she said brokenly. “You must not do this. You must not deliberately sacrifice yourself——”

“Cut it out, will you?” he roughly intervened. “I know what must be done here, Nora. I’m not making any grandstand play, either. I can hold ’em up, and you can send down a Dutch launch with a gun in her. They have ’em with machine-guns and pom-poms. One o’ their launches could sink that blamed junk in a jiffy! They’ll come quick enough, too! Believe me, those Dutchmen like nothing better than wiping out pirates, unless it’s wiping out plague-ships. They do both jobs up brown.”

“Stop evading, please,” she broke in. “Why are you doing this? Why don’t you leave one of those Chinese here, and go with us?”

The face of Barnes twisted wryly.

“Gosh, I wish that I could!” he said almost wistfully. “Nope. Whoever stays here will have a sweet time of it. Besides, I’m good for nothing else. Those quartermasters are darned fine men, Nora; they’ll see you through safe. You’ve got to realize that

we're up against a desperate affair, and no half-way measures will serve!"

She stared into his eyes for a moment.

"Is it for the children that you're doing it?" she asked. "They aren't worth it, I tell you! Three Arab children—they aren't worth the loss of a man like you!"

"You know better, girl," he said quietly, and she shivered.

"Is it—us? Is it for her? Then, do you think she'd want to leave you? Do you think she'd want to live and know that you had died here——"

"Shut up; you'll be hysterical if you keep up this gait," interrupted Barnes. "Now, young lady, you can gamble good and hard that I don't want to stay here! Not much. If there was any way out of it, I wouldn't. I'm not hankering for a martyr's crown or any of that hero stuff, not for a minute! I'm for keeping Jim Barnes topside every time. It hurts like hell to realize that there's no other way out. But here are you girls, and

the kids, and somebody has to wait here. See? It just has to be done, that's all."

"Then—then you don't believe that—we can reach the post in time?"

"Well, anything's possible," said Barnes dryly. "Sure, there's a chance! Now, I want you to get off before Ellen wakes up, see? Let her sleep as long as she will; this faint of hers is liable to go into sleep."

Meantime, the two quartermasters, while lightening the boat of everything except food and a breaker of water, had been drinking in what they could understand of this conversation. Their work finished, they stood by the bow of the boat and looked at each other for a moment, silent. At length Li Fu spoke, impassively, unconcerned.

"To the superior man, duty is as a clear star shining in the night."

"So it is written," agreed Hi John. "Give me your revolver and cartridges."

"Haste treads upon the tail of a tiger," dis-

sented Li Fu reflectively. "Here is the revolver. Let us see to whom the gods assign it. Shall a white man be braver than we?"

"Very well."

Li Fu tossed his revolver in the air. It spun, end over end, and spinning, fell down into the sand. The butt fell toward Li Fu, who stooped and picked it up.

"Now give me yours," he said.

Hi John obeyed without protest, passing over his revolver and what spare cartridges he had in his pockets. Then he turned and walked to Barnes and Nora Sayers, who had watched this scene curiously. He addressed the girl.

"Misse, I think mebbeso you can row plenty good?"

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "Of course I can!"

"Then you row along me," said Hi John. "Li Fu, he stop here."

Barnes growled something under his breath, and walked over to Li Fu.

"What's this mean?" he demanded. "You get in that boat and row, d'you understand?"

Li Fu regarded him placidly, without emotion, his yellow features very composed.

"You go hellee," he said, and then grinned. "My stop along you. Savvy? Missee plenty stlong, use oar plenty good! You go hellee."

What he saw in those calm eyes checked the words on the lips of Barnes. He turned and went to the boat, and waded out along the gunwale until he was beside the figure of Ellen Maggs. With an effort, he stooped and touched his lips to her still cheek.

"Good-by, girl!" he whispered, and then straightened. "Get the kids, Nora! Come on, pile in; time to get off! Get as far as you can before it gets dark. Wrap a cloth about your hands, too; they'll be blistered 'quick enough."

Collecting the children, Nora Sayers got into the boat. She held out her hand to Barnes, who gripped it and smiled cheerfully.

"Good-by," she said, her voice breaking.

"I wish you'd let me wake her up! She'd want to say——"

"She'd say I needed a shave damn bad," and Barnes chuckled as he made reply. "You settle down on this thwart. All ready, men? Shove off. Good luck to you, Nora! Wrap your hands, now, before you get started. See you later!"

The boat glided out, Hi John scrambling aboard as she cleared the sand. Nora Sayers tried to answer, but could not. Barnes stood beside Li Fu and waved his hand.

The boat slowly drew up-river under the pull of the two oars and vanished around the head of the islet.

VIII

WATCH and watch, Li Fu," said Barnes, when night settled down on the islet, the river-mouth and the booming surf. "I'm done in. Wake me at midnight; they'll not come until then."

"Not then, I think," said Li Fu. "China boys not like night devils. Plenty devils in liver."

"All right," Barnes laughed as he stretched out in the warm sand. "Let the river-devils fight for us, then!"

About midnight the quartermaster wakened him. There had been no alarm, no sound or sight of the enemy. Only the continuous rolling crash of the surf, regular and unceasing, conflicted with the noises of night-birds from the jungle. The starlight and thin glow of the sickle moon faintly illumined the

white sands and the glittering waters, where the waves curled and broke in running lines of phosphorescent radiance.

At first Barnes found Li Fu's conviction incredible. It was hard to believe that Lim Tock's lascars and Chinese, the latter probably predominating, would relinquish the opportunity to sweep in upon the islet with their boats and finish everything with one determined rush. The Chinese firmly credited the existence of water-devils, however, and river-devils in particular, whose power at night was invincible.

Barnes sat through his lonely watch, stiff and aching from his wound, and found no indication of alarm out on the surging waters, where a heavy ground-swell kept the rollers tumbling in along the shoreline. He began to think that he had wasted himself, despite all. Had he stayed in the boat, it by this time would be far up the river.

He laughed and shook off the thought. After all, he had no assurance of that! The

boat, with only two oars, might be a day or two in reaching the main river above the delta, where the Dutch post would be placed. With dawn, the pirates would sweep down on the island. If they found it deserted, they would go up the river with a rush. No, the effort was not wasted; was far from wasted!

Toward dawn he roused Li Fu, and lay down once more to get all the rest possible. When the quartermaster again wakened him, it was to point out dark dots on the waters, now overcast with the graying dawn. The boats, four of them, were scattered a quarter-mile from the river mouth, up and down from the bar. Jim Barnes laughed softly.

"They think we'll come out with the first breath o' wind; that we've been waiting here for the breeze! And they're waiting to riddle us with their rifles, then close in. Good! Let 'em wait. Every minute gained puts the whaleboats farther up the river. Suppose we make some tea, Li Fu. The fire will show that we're here and encourage 'em to wait."

Chuckling at all this, Li Fu gathered wood and soon had a fire going. Hot tea and biscuit invigorated Barnes hugely, and he was much himself again by the time the reddening dawn and freshening daylight betrayed to the waiting boats that the fugitives were not setting forth from shore. No doubt they considered that Barnes had laid up the whaleboat and was prepared to fight it out.

"They're closing in," said Barnes suddenly. "Oars are out. The junk is coming down the coast, too. She'll probably anchor off the river, and they'll pour in a hot rifle-fire before making a rush. Dig for cover, Li!"

Grasping the idea, Li Fu took his knife to the sand and prepared two long, deep depressions at the edge of the brush.

Meantime, one of the boats drew in closer than the others as though to test the presence of those on the islet. Barnes sighed unavailingly for a rifle, as his pistols were of small value at such distance. He tried two shots, however, and by sheer luck dropped the boat's

helmsman, so that she sheered off promptly. The boats opened a dropping rifle-fire, and Barnes retired to the position prepared. Lying beside Li Fu, he waited. He had three automatics and several spare clips. The quartermaster had two revolvers and a handful of loose cartridges.

Under the urge of the ground-swell, surf was now breaking in a heavy line at the bar, an outer line of breakers stretching twenty yards farther seaward. While the boats kept up their intermittent fire, bullets crashing across the island, the junk came slowly along with the morning breeze. Outside the first line of surf she dropped anchor and hauled down the brown matting sails, and the boats converged upon her. Streamers and fingers of flame were reaching across the whole eastern sky.

"Plenty of men aboard her," said Barnes. "They'll crowd into the boats and pull for us. Catch the first boat as she rises, Li, like we did last night. If one of them goes over in that

surf, not a man will reach shore. Good gosh, look at her rise up! They're fools if they try it."

To the two men lying on the sandy islet, the surf promised indeed to be an excellent protection. The roaring breakers swept on and hurled up into a great wall of white and crimson spray, against the sunrise, a ten-foot wall of curling, foaming water whose impact as it came down made the islet shake and sent a booming roar echoing along the coast. The tide was coming in, and there was a strong rip along the bar.

Now the sun was up, in a gleaming splendor of golden glory.

As each glittering line of surf swept up and curled, it hid from sight the boats and all save the upper masts of the junk herself. Between the surges, the rifle-fire was maintained steadily, but Li Fu and Barnes were well protected against the ripping storm of lead that devastated the foliage above and ploughed the sand into ripples of dancing grains.

"They come," said Li Fu suddenly.

The next surf-interval showed a crowded boat leaving the junk. The craft damaged on the preceding evening by Hi John's bullet must have sunk, for it appeared that now there were but two whaleboats among the four approaching craft. One of those, however, would do the business, thought Jim Barnes grimly.

Covered by a hot fire from the rifles, the first boat reached in for the surf, her oars dipping strongly, the other boats following her. She was a bluff-jawed longboat belonging to the junk, dangerously crowded with men, and Barnes caught the flame of naked steel as she lifted on a crest. He thrilled to the possibility of sending her over as she struck the white wall to cleave a way through. Not a man would reach shore through the pounding maelstrom of those waters.

Thundering and shuddering, a long breaker smashed and swirled across the bar, and now the longboat dipped oars and gathered way to

rise on the next crest and come over. A whirl of bullets heralded her coming. Then, as the riotous crest closed in and lifted her and the shots ceased, Barnes came to one knee. He had her position absolutely fixed, and aimed carefully, firing even before she came into sight.

She heaved and lifted, cleaving the water. Barnes fired again and again, hearing the bark of Li Fu's revolver at his side. A mad yell broke from the Chinese. Barnes lowered his arm and stared, wide-eyed.

That first shot of his, perhaps, had done the work; had sent a rower headlong at the crucial instant. At the very crest of the giant wave, the boat broached, was sent stern-first. A shriek burst from the score of men crowded into her, a fearful, splitting shriek that wrenched through the roar of the surf. Then she was picked up, hurled end over end from the crest of the wave, flung sideways, and went upside down beneath the terrific smash of that falling pinnacle of water.

A lather of foam spread out from the sweeping rush of the breaker, but not a man showed in it. They were held down, dragged out with the backlash, gripped and flung about with the mad swirl under the surface. The boat itself, a crushed and broken thing, came into sight, was tugged out and into the next surf-crest, to be whirled horribly aloft and buried again; but no man of all her crew appeared.

The whiff of a bullet made Barnes wake up, and he flung himself into the sand. Li Fu was yelling in an ecstasy of delight. Then, at the next interval, Barnes realized that the other boats were coming forward—two whale-boats, and a smaller craft.

“Lascars!” yelled Li Fu. “Plenty joss along Lim Tock!”

The Malays were rowing these boats; seamen unsurpassed. Well, this was the end of it; useless everything that had been done, once these boats came through. Barnes caught the arm of the yellow man.

“Empty one gun—then reload and wait. Savvy?”

Li Fu nodded hastily. The two whale-boats came on abreast, rowed with precision, a brown Malay at each steering crutch, the long oars rising and dipping and hurling her forward with absolute surety. Up they rose and up, then forward and down, as though leaping from that high curling wall into the water beyond!

Barnes found himself firing mechanically, firing until the hammer clicked on nothing and he slipped one of his extra clips into the weapon. Useless! A sudden inarticulate cry escaped his lips. The last bullet had brought down the steersman of the boat to the left. Almost through, she broached and swerved. The water swung her about, caught up her keel and spilled her men into the smother. She was sent rolling along, crushing the men beneath her, pounding on the sand until the undertow dragged her out and away.

But the other boat was through. It drove

forward toward the islet with a wild yell lifting from the men aboard, and rifles spattering lead. And now the smaller boat was in the surf, and riding it.

"Back!" shouted Barnes. "Back to cover, Li! Fire and reload while I fire."

From the shelter of the brush, Li Fu emptied his two revolvers into the boat. He could hardly miss at this distance, as she came foaming to the shore. Barnes could see the figure of Lim Tock crouching amidships, a bandage about his head. Men went down, brown and yellow men crowded between her thwarts. Rifles and revolvers sent bullets hailing at the trees, and with the impetus that was upon her, she came in and her nose touched the beach.

Barnes was ready, cool, imperturbable. The first man that leaped from her, he dropped; and the second, and the third. Then the boat tipped, and brown and yellow came ashore in a mass, Lim Tock heading them. Krisses and knives flamed in the sunlight. The

smaller boat was reaching into the shore now. The end was at hand.

Into the mass Barnes planted his bullets steadily. One gun was empty, now the other. No time to reload—he dropped them and seized that of Ellen Maggs. Only three or four men left, Lim Tock heading them! Then a new burst of yells, and from the last boat poured a dozen fresh assailants, with the serang Gajah at their head, his unhealed scalp wound red and ominous in the sunlight.

A scream of battle-madness burst from Li Fu. He leaped forward, out into the open, and ran at the newcomers. Pistols barked; krisses glittered. Barnes saw the quartermaster come to grips with Gajah, and the two men went rolling in the sand. Then, smiling, he lifted his weapon and shot.

Lim Tock took the bullet between the eyes, and sprawled forward. Barnes laughed, and shot again. Then he ducked back into the brush. An instant later, the brown and yellow men came on in a wave, mad with the

battle fury, blind and deaf to everything around them, intent only upon the white man who had eluded them.

From among the trees the weapon of Barnes barked out its last shots.

IX

THE patrol launch belonging to the Bulungan River post, commanded by Controleur Opdyke and manned by stalwart Achinese sepoy, sped swiftly down the northern branch of the mighty river. The controleur was highly nervous, for this navigation in the early dawn was an unaccustomed and perilous thing; further, the girl who stood beside him, and the tall Chinese at her elbow, were continually urging him to greater speed.

Then came the first gleams of sunrise, and the spattering of shots from below—and the prim, alert controleur needed no further urging. At his swift command the speed was increased, and the brown sepoy stripped the cover from the one-pounder up forward. Rifles were brought up and loaded.

They burst into full view of the river-mouth just as the smaller boat came to the islet and poured forth her men and the wild charge forward was begun. Controleur Opdyke perceived instantly that he could not get through the surf to the junk. Being a man of distinct character, he did not hesitate. Two orders passed his lips. At the first, the gun crew threw in a shell and sighted; at the second, the rifles began to speak along the forward deck.

The little pom-pom barked, and the shell exploded above the junk. It barked again, and scored a hit. Again, and the junk reeled and staggered. Then the Achinese were leaping overboard and pouring ashore, and among them Hi John.

And after them, despite the imploring commands of the officer, Ellen Maggs.

Jim Barnes came face to face with her as he squirmed out of the brush and brushed the blood from his eyes. A kris had slithered athwart his scalp; for a moment he thought

she was a vision, standing there in the fresh sunlight, her eyes fastened upon him, her hands outreaching. Then he heard her voice.

“Oh, Jim, Jim! If you had only known—it was barely five miles up to the post! And we were hours getting there. Thank God, you’re alive!”

It was quite as a matter of course that Jim Barnes took her in his arms and held her close to him for a long moment. Speech came hard. There was everything to say, and nothing. Suddenly he realized that she was trembling.

“Oh, Jim! You’ll have to help me. I—I told an awful lie——”

She was frightened, nervous, tearful, and yet a smile crept into her blushing cheeks as she looked up into his eyes.

“Who to, me?” he asked, returning the smile.

“No. To—to the controleur. Controleur Updyke. He was terribly severe about it all. He wouldn’t bring Nora, and he wasn’t going to bring me——”

"What was the lie?" asked Barnes, puzzled.

Then he looked up to see the officer striding toward them. He realized abruptly that the little brown soldiers had been very busy all over the islet.

"Der junk hass sunk," said the controleur, taking off his helmet. "Diss iss Mynheer Parnes? I am pleased to meet you, sir."

"Same to you," and Barnes grinned as he put out his hand. Even the primness of Opdyke could not meet that grin without an answering smile. "Controleur Opdyke? I'm sure much obliged to you. Just came along in time."

"Ja. I am glad. Your *vrouw*, Madame Parnes, she hurried us. Dat wass goot, too."

"Oh, so that's it!" Barnes laughed out suddenly, and caught Ellen Maggs to him. "You little rascal, you! Told him you were my wife, eh? Well, you will be as quick as it can be managed—won't you? Say yes!"

"Yes, Jim," she murmured.

Suddenly Barnes turned.

"Where's Li Fu?" he demanded. "That Chinese chap who stayed with me——"

"He iss badly hurt, but all right," said Opdyke, beginning to understand things a little. "Sir, dere must be reports made, und prisoners must be——"

"Forget it, forget it!" said Barnes, and laughed happily. "This is Miss Maggs, Controleur. She told you a lie. She's not my wife, but is going to be. Will you forgive her?"

Controleur Opdyke met the eyes of Ellen Maggs. Suddenly he smiled, and tendered her a very deep bow.

"Diss young man, he iss very lucky," he said. "*Mejuffvrouw*, shall I make you happy, yes? Den, dere iss a missionary at de post. Now, if you eggscuse me, I must look after dese t'ings."

He turned and walked stiffly away toward his men, who were rounding up sullen cap-

tives. But Jim Barnes looked down into the shining eyes of the girl.

"Ellen! Remember that bungalow on the hill above Sausalito that I told you about? Do you really want it—and a husband who's a sailor and hasn't a lot o' money? Or would you sooner go back to China?"

A smile lightened in her face.

"I'm tired of China, Jim," she said.

Delightedly, Barnes caught her to him again and stooped to her lips. Then, with a happy laugh, he straightened up.

"Missionary at the post, eh? Hurray! Let's go!"

"Aye, aye, sir," she said obediently. "Go it is, sir—steady as she is!"

THE END

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